2018

National Dances of The Nutcracker : A Study of Racial, Cultural, and National Depictions in a Classical Ballet

Meredith Hunter-Mason
Butler University

BUTLER UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Honors Thesis Certification

Please type all information in this section:

Applicant Meredith Hunter-Mason

Thesis title National Dances of The Nutcracker: A Study of Racial, Cultural, and National Depictions in a Classical Ballet

Intended date of commencement May 12, 2018

Read, approved, and signed by:

Thesis adviser(s) _____ 5.4.18 Date

_____ Date

Reader(s) _____ 5/8/18 Date

_____ Date

_____ Date

Certified by _____ Director, Honors Program Date

For Honors Program use:

Level of Honors conferred: University _____

Departmental _____

_____

_____

National Dances of *The Nutcracker*:
A Study of Racial, Cultural, and National Depictions in a Classical Ballet

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Dance

Jordan College of the Arts

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Meredith Hunter-Mason

May 11, 2018

I. Introduction

Classical ballet is an art form that has been highly esteemed since it first appeared in the royal courts in the eighteenth century. Although contemporary choreographers are creating fresh, new ballets every day, Marius Petipa's and Lev Ivanov's classics remain fan favorites. The entertainment aspect of these remained constant over time, the plot and character development however, do not measure up to today's societal expectations. Many classical ballets include sections that pose the risk of cultural misrepresentation and social generalizations. Renowned ballet critic, Alastair Macaulay, explains "cliched and sometimes offensive views of race remain alive and well across the art form. Several of the old ballets and a few of the new ones give us national and racial stereotypes that would be un-showable in a play or movie. And yet they draw audiences" (Macaulay, 2012). To address the concerns that Macaulay brings up, I have focused on the national dances in *The Nutcracker.* My thesis investigates the presence of national depictions in classical ballets by defining culture and cultural misrepresentation. The thesis confirms the inclusion and origins of national dances in *The Nutcracker* and delves into the authenticity of the choreographic approach and the musical composition. The thesis concludes in a discussion of the acceptance of cultural misrepresentations in *The Nutcracker*, among other well- known classical ballets – an acceptance that is not apparent in other art forms.

II. What is Culture?

Culture is everchanging and its meaning is subject to the user of the word, making it a difficult concept to define. Raymond Williams has called it, "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Jenks, 2005). To apply this complex idea to the scope of this research, utilization of several explanations will be necessary.

Up until the 18th century, the definition of culture was indistinguishable from the idea of civilization. The terms were used synonymously to differentiate human kind from all other species, rather than delve into the nuances within human kind and compare them to one another (Williams, 1958). Currently, the rapid progress of society in terms of technology, politics, art and more, make it increasingly difficult to provide a definition of culture that is agreeable to the masses: "civilization is now a matter of fact, while culture is a question of value" (Eagleton, 2016). Regardless of the adaptations of the word, there is no question that culture is specific to people and their relation to the world.

Although the presence of culture divides humans from other species, it unifies those within the human population. Culture provides materials and customs that enable people to relate to one another and build relationships. Humans bond over their ability to understand the world around them on a level that is unparalleled by other species. Before recognizing it as a multifaceted concept, the appeal of culture is being involved in something uniquely human. Looking beyond the exclusivity of culture however, it is acknowledged that there are various cultures within human civilization. This aspect of discovering one another's cultures serves as a second appeal because, "culture is a form of knowledge gained through engagement with people" (Reeves-Ellington, 2010). Not only do humans appreciate the existence of their own culture, but they also have the opportunity to explore each other's cultures.

Culture can also be defined by proximity. T.S. Eliot "sometimes uses the word descriptively, to mean the way of life of a particular people living together in one place" (Eagleton, 2016). Those who live in a central location with access to similar things can create a culture of their own regardless of socioeconomic status.

The most useful definition for research purposes, explains culture in terms of people's nationalities. This definition stems from a very specific characteristic but, encompasses much more than other senses of the word. Subcultures that are defined by ethnicity or class are "shaped by language, tradition, art, politics, and so much more" (Reeves-Ellington, 2010). These subcultures make up society and its values. In terms of this research, the term culture is used in regard to a subgroup defined by ethnicity, race, or nationality.

III. Culture and Representation

In addition to understanding the nuances of culture, and the difficulty in defining it, it is vital to recognize the presence of the infinite number of cultures in the world. As mentioned, culture connects people to one another through shared interests and customs. But what connects one culture to another?

Representation is the avenue that connects and enables the exchange of information between members of cultures. It is the initial preview into lives unlike our own. To see a culture represented visually or literally is what creates our first impression of those dissimilar to us and therefore gives it meaning. For example, to see the green of Ireland's flag represented throughout St. Patrick's Day, gives meaning to that color and that characteristic. Acceptance of the color green as a representation of Ireland, is a window into the Irish culture through visual representation of a holiday that originated in the country. This example is an oversimplification of how representation gives culture meaning – cultures are far more complex and are represented in much more intricate ways to make further connections. (Hall, 1997)

Humans are eager to grasp representations of cultures because of our innate curiosity. As soon as humans can express their curiosity, they do – often asking questions about how the world

works and why. Curiosity is the pursuit of knowledge, “like a reverse law of gravity, curiosity causes our experience of the world and of ourselves to increase with the asking: curiosity helps us grow” (Manguel, 2015). It is what leads us to connect the first representation of a culture we are exposed to, to that group of people. Human curiosity also explains why humans choose to represent cultures different from their own in the first place. Curiosity is the motivation to understand the world around us, including its people, and particularly those people that are most different from us.

The exoticism of people who are different from the majority is what makes their lives so intriguing. It fuels artists and man-kind to attempt to represent them. Humans recognize other cultures as the absence of their own, for example, whites versus non-whites. The realization that people know what their culture is not, drives the curiosity to define what is in place of that absence in other cultures. In the effort to define the absence, minorities “seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic”. Although such binary representation can lead to misrepresentations or exaggerations, it is also what keeps people interested in others – fascination of those who are significantly different. (Hall, 1997)

The representation of cultures is motivated by the curiosity to know that which diverges, but the ability to represent is determined by the power of the culture representing. Minority cultures may be equally fascinated by cultures of more power, but they do not have the control or influence to represent them and therefore do not. Cultures in power have the ability to answer questions of curiosity because of the power they hold. This promotion reaches large audiences

and is accepted widely as exclusive knowledge, once again feeding the intellectual pursuit of explaining others. (Ziff, Rao, 1997)

The culmination of connecting cultures, human curiosity, minority fascination, and the imbalance of power all motivate and allow humans to represent one another. A primary vehicle of such representation is one that appeals to all languages: art. Cultural representation is present in film, theatre, music, visual art, dance and various other forms of communication that satisfy the public's need for knowledge in an accessible way. Representative art is often created by those in power and because it is so appealing and convenient it takes the forefront as factual representations and leads to cultural misrepresentation and cultural appropriation.

IV. Cultural Misrepresentation and Cultural Appropriation

As discussed, cultural representation has a strong presence in the arts and in Robert Fulford, a Canadian artist's, opinion, "even the most modest education in cultural history teaches us that art of all kinds has depended on the mixing of cultures" (Fulford, 1993). But, where do we draw the line between art and cultural misrepresentation or appropriation? The power of artists to promote other's cultures in certain lights can lead to a struggle of accuracy versus artistic perspective.

The root of this tension can be drawn to the fact that people own their culture and stories. Although individuals are curious about other people's perspectives, they are extremely possessive of their own. Each human has lived individual experiences which allows them to be objective about their lives, therefore, "there is a protocol if you want to tell those stories: you go to the storyteller. And if you don't and you start telling those stories, then you are stealing" (Ziff,

Rao, 1997). The idea that there is ownership of stories and cultures, that they can be stolen, adds a tangible element to culture that heightens the tension that cultural representation ignites.

Cultural appropriation, like culture itself, is a complex term and increasingly sensitive topic in society today. It is a multidimensional phenomenon but is simply defined as, "the taking – from a culture that is not one's own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge." In the context of art, cultural appropriation requires not only stealing stories but representing them from the artist's understanding or perspective. Cultural appropriation differs from cultural misrepresentation in that it does not require that the aspect or story be displayed incorrectly. Cultural appropriation assumes the perspective as if it were one's own, but since it is not, it is automatically appropriating even if it is accurate. Aside from crossing the boundary of possessive storytellers, cultural appropriation is also harmful because it takes the voice from minority cultures. There have been some efforts to decrease cultural appropriation by using the law to protect culture and ritual. As a part of the Model Revisions enacted in Canada in 1982, the Model Act protects expressions of folklore. The act forbids members of a culture from presenting folklore of a different culture in various forms, including folk dance. This strive to prevent cultural appropriation is productive, however, it does not stop artists from representing cultures using their own experiences and therefore presents a loophole: cultural misrepresentation. (Ziff, Rao, 1997)

Cultural misrepresentation is as harmful to cultures as appropriation because it presents them incorrectly or narrow-mindedly. Cultural misrepresentation is a question of authenticity, particularly because the creator is not a member of the culture that it is stereotyping. Misrepresentation is present in art when it defines cultures by "any simple, vivid, memorable,

easily grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or development is kept to a minimum" or in other words, stereotypes. (Hall, 1997)

Cultural misrepresentation and stereotypes are found in many forms but have a large presence in the arts and are often committed by white artists. Kwame Dawes, a Ghanaian poet, poses his stance on white artist's tendency to culturally misrepresent:

> "Art may be seen as a means by which we interpret and represent society in a fashion that is dictated by our discourse – our history, our culture, our social realities and our politics. If we grant, then, that white artists have essentially dominated the highest echelons of art for too long, and if we further accept that this is a product, not of artistic ability, but of political and cultural will, then there is a place for the redressing of what is essentially an injustice. There is a place for suggesting that non-white artists be allowed to tell their own story. In fact, it must go further than that – non-white artists should be encouraged, aided, supported, and funded such that they can tell their own stories. At the same time, white artists should be heavily scrutinized such that they can be discouraged from embarking on projects that essentially perpetuate the negative stereotyping of non-white cultures." (Ziff, Rao, 1997)

Dawes's statement claims that white artists promote stereotypes of minority cultures through art. Additionally, "for populations increasingly aware of their own national identities there is an appetite for the unfamiliar and the exotic" and specifically in the realm of ballet, "use of national movement phrases allowed for stereotyping of characteristics on stage and became part of the cultural memory" (Tendu TV, 2015). This claim will pave the way through a further analysis of cultural representation in the classical ballet *The Nutcracker*.

The analysis of culture, cultural appropriation, cultural misrepresentation, and discovering the motives behind such terms helps create parallels between the national dances in *The Nutcracker*. To recap, Culture is what enables humans to relate to one another. It is "what people collectively 'do' in their different ways, in different places, and at different times" (Jenks, 2004). It is imperative to acknowledge culture's ever-changing

definition, but for the context of this research, culture is accepted as the nuances of subgroups defined by ethnic, national, or racial characteristics. People have pride for these characteristics and their backgrounds and therefore showcase aspects of their culture through art. People also show large interest in each other; their curiosity motivates them to pursue knowledge of other cultures. Minority cultures, however, are often represented by white artists who are at risk of both cultural appropriation and cultural misrepresentation. Artists who hold power are accused of stealing stories of other's cultures or stereotyping cultures.

V. Ballet in Culture

Dance is a large component of unifying citizens and has been a major key to culture since its conception. In the culture of ancient Greece, dance enabled people to relate to the practice of becoming a proper citizen. Dance was taught and executed "to provide a cleansing, cathartic release and to educate good citizens" (Strauss, 2003). The movements were much different than those included in dance culture today and were enacted for different reasons. In the past, some societies danced to serve their gods, including movement in religious ceremonies. Others used dance as a way of communication. Still, others used dance to express themselves. Regardless of the reason to dance, the dancers related over their common drive to move.

The first hints of ballet emerged in the 17th century in the French Court. Under his rule the king, Louis XIV, shared his love of dance by making it integral to life in the court. Incorporating court etiquette and peasant's folk dancing, the movement was codified by dance masters and gradually transformed into the technique known as ballet today. Influenced by political and cultural events and with the development of music, costumes, and libretto, ballet became increasingly intricate. Transitioning from court-style, to romanticism, to classicism,

ballet grew to be the pinnacle of elegance in art in European culture. Renowned choreographers, musicians, and dancers shaped what ballet is today and upheld its place in culture. (Homans, 2010)

VI. Folk Dance

Folk dance was a key component to the early development of ballet through the court. The court took folk dances and adjusted them to a more proper taste, they brought in entertainers who were once peasants to refine the dances into something more acceptable. The idea of representing culture through folk dance contributed to movement style and inspired the incorporation of national dances and folk dancing in classical ballets.

Folk dance is movement that has a strong tie to a specific place with the main purpose of cultivating a community atmosphere. Folk dance "in its first existence is chiefly an integral part of the life of a community. It has an important function in the community. And to take it away from it is essentially to damage the life of the community" (Hoerburger, 1968). Folk dance is able to involve the whole community because the movement is intended for the common person, incorporating simple steps such as walking, skipping, and hopping. The main focus of folk dancing is not to perform or execute the steps flawlessly, but to feel a connection with the community and experience joy.

In addition to community, nationalism is also a component of folk dance because of the element of ritual that is present. Folk dancing was used in ritualistic settings to send a message that was specific to that culture and its customs. "Just as dancing differed from tribe to tribe, folk dances developed differently from place to place. Every local group has its own peculiarities of movement stemming from physical build, occupation, and national

quality." This national quality is what differentiated one type of folk dance to the next and is what made it appealing to the royalty in the court. (Cass, 1993)

As folk dance developed in the French court, it's focus shifted from personal enjoyment to outward entertainment. Folk dances were integral to social interactions and putting these national dances on stage was a way to dramatize the social occasions. Consequently, folk dance standards became stage routines. Furthermore, "as the concept of nation and nationalism took hold, dances equated with national identity translated those concepts onto 19th-century ballet stages. The character's national identity became a shorthand that helped define the audience aspects of a personality. In essence, national dance became the medium through which human characterization on stage was made possible" (Tendu TV, 2015). Marius Petipa, one of the most influential ballet choreographers capitalized on this idea of representation in many of his classical ballets. Analysis of his choreography, specifically in *The Nutcracker*, allows for a deeper look into the appeal of incorporating national dances.

VII. Marius Petipa

Marius Petipa, a French choreographer, captivated audiences with his works beginning in the mid-19th century. He introduced lengthy story ballets abundant with technical aspects that changed the ballet world. Since Petipa, there have been numerous choreographers who have created extremely successful ballets. However, because of their caliber and majesty, Petipa's pieces are still performed by major companies around the world today.

The major factor that motivates Petipa ballet's relevance is the unwavering choreography. The choreographer incorporated specific movements that "combined finesse with technical virtuosity" (Reynolds, McCormick, p. 37). He included a segment of steps – almost always

repeated thrice – that showcased a multitude of strengths. The use of epaulement and intricate port de bras was a trademark of Petipa's. He also used dynamic changes from large, adage like movements to quick, upbeat steps to keep the audience's attention. Petipa's choreography was unexpected yet charming. The repetitive contrast in his ballets preserves them as challenging and entertaining works. Only dancers of advanced technicality and musicality can be of service to Petipa's masterpieces.

The movement alone did not propel Petipa's ballets into major successes. The partnership of Petipa and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer, proved to be essential to the high achieving works. Tchaikovsky was a previously established composer who was hesitant to create music for ballets he considered trivial. The pairing of the composer and the choreographer, however, would further Tchaikovsky's career through a new approach. The composer created music with the anticipation of Petipa's interpretation. This allowed the choreography to highlight Tchaikovsky's intentional nuances in the score. The addition of high caliber music to state of the art choreography maximized the strengths in both facets. "The key to ballet's enduring appeal, however, was Tchaikovsky. It is a point worth emphasizing: Tchaikovsky was the first composer of real stature to see ballet as a substantial art, and his music lifted dance onto a new plane" (Homans, p. 278). Tchaikovsky and Petipa became an irresistible pair which contributes to the relevance they hold today as a powerful combination.

The choreography of each Petipa ballet was driven by the detailed libretto: mime, character dances, and an expanded plot intrigued the audience. Each dancer delved into their own character regardless of the significance they had in the plot. The multitude of personalities on stage allowed for genuine mime passages that carried out the story of the ballet more so than the difficult choreography. Character dances that portrayed different cultures added an element of

exoticism – despite the inaccuracies that Fokine later attempted to amend. Overall, the successful execution of the unwieldly stories offers resolution that is satisfying to the viewer. The audience's eagerness to explore the libretto maximized the popularity of the ballets in the time of their creation and today.

The culmination of technically stunning choreography, enhancing complementary music, and a fascinating plot thrust Petipa ballets' success through their time and into modern companies' repertoire, confirming their relevance. Ballet companies broadcast their showings of Petipa's ballets giving credit to the French choreographer, however notable adjustments to the legendary ballets call for a reexamination of their authenticity.

Since Petipa, ballet has progressed causing dancers to exponentially advance in technique and ability. In order to capitalize on the dancer's skills, current choreographers cater Petipa's version to the dancer by adjusting the original choreography. Some alterations to Petipa's choreography are simply for aesthetic reasons because of changing artistic taste. The details in the libretto are also adjusted to better suit the audience's modern perception. Specifically, in the *The Nutcracker*, mime scenes are largely amended to preserve a comedic approach that will inevitably change as society's taste in comedy changes. A change in cultural dances is also present, some in an effort to avoid cultural appropriation. These changes lead to deviations from Petipa's original choreography creating numerous versions of the ballets across the world. Each company, however, claims to present the Petipa version: "all these ballets are called classics. Yet all of them are mired in issues of textual corruption and confusion that go beyond anything in drama or classical music: they're somebody's version of somebody else's version of somebody else's version" (Macauley, New York Times). Accounting for the changes in the ballets, it is somewhat impossible to expect that the choreography remains undisturbed over hundreds of

years of societal and cultural advancements. Petipa ballets are strong enough to remain relevant on their own, but contemporary alterations assist in guaranteeing the survival of Petipa's classics. Regardless of whose version the ballet is, it always contrives from Petipa's original version which validates companies' choices to regard their versions as Petipa-based.

With the high amount of variations on Petipa ballets, it is important to question the constant reliance on Petipa to tell stories in ballet. If so many changes in the classics are necessary, why do Petipa ballets remain the prime vehicle for story ballets rather than new choreographic works?

Petipa was the first in his time to effortlessly juxtapose strong ballet choreography with an exciting supporting plot. In order to create such masterpieces, it is vital to connect a sharp, enchanting, and conclusive idea with relevant dancing. Petipa had a keen ability to do this but also "had a deep appreciation of the architecture and physics of ballet, and he knew, or learned, how to refine and discipline their bombast and enthusiasm to give them a depth and dimension they lacked hitherto" (Homans, p. 276). Petipa was able to access a trifecta of choreography, libretto, and music that heightened his success. A trifecta that has been impossible to achieve since his time and one that has arguably not been accessed since the reign of George Balanchine and his ballets. Because of this, it is quite simple why artists turn to Marius Petipa: his ballets were undeniably successful. Such as classic literature, film, and art dominate their respective fields, classic ballet choreography will continue to dominate the field in the form of unyielding achievements.

Petipa's everlasting reign is an inspiring vault of creativity that would prove valuable to contemporary artists striving to accomplish similar goals in expression. Petipa studied his art and audience to discover what would make his works different and superior. He triggered various aspects of the human mind and emotion to entice the viewer into investing in the art. He created

visual appeals through dynamics: simple versus intricate and literal gestures versus suggestive ones. He triggered the audience's emotions by including beauty, elegance, and happiness polarized by dark and evil movements and characters. Petipa was able to access various routes of human perception through storytelling that contemporary movement has the ability to do.

Marius Petipa remains one of ballet's most renowned choreographers and storytellers. His works are relevant today throughout the ballet world. Balletomanes are familiar with every aspect of his most famous works and have the ability to perform one of his variations on a whim. The average citizen is familiar with the accompanying music that is often used in advertisements and holiday traditions. His ballets inspire additional forms of art, such as film. "Petipa's legacy was enormous. His early ballets were largely forgotten, but the later years of his reign at the Imperial Theaters saw the creation of nearly all of the ballets that would form the base of the classical tradition for the century to come" (Homans, p. 288). Marius Petipa reigned the ballet world and to this day, his ballets continue to do so defining the master choreographer as everlasting.

VIII. The Nutcracker

One of Petipa's best works and arguably the most well-known ballet in America is *The Nutcracker*. It is vital to investigate the origins and history of this ballet to further navigate its use of national dances and cultural misrepresentation.

The Nutcracker made its debut in 1892 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. Marius Petipa had achieved great success in his choreography and creation of *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* with composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The pair collaborated for a third and final time to create *The Nutcracker*. The story is based on Alexandre Dumas's

adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffman's whimsical short story. Marius Petipa was the intended choreographer but unexpectedly fell ill, leaving the majority of the work to ballet master, Lev Ivanov. Before his health declined, Petipa wrote the libretto for the ballet and gave instruction to Tchaikovsky for the composition. Tchaikovsky did not approve of Petipa's vision nor did he find the libretto compelling, however, he agreed to compose the score. This disapproval was later matched by audience members who were not satisfied with the ballet's debut in Russia, "calling it 'an insult' to the Imperial Theaters and 'death for the company.' And indeed – ironically, in view of its iconic status today – the ballet had only limited public appeal and soon fell from the repertory" (Homans, 2010). (Fisher, 2003)

The Nutcracker tells the story of a young girl's adventure to a land of her dreams. The story is set in Germany at Christmastime. The ballet begins at a Christmas party where the main character, most commonly referred to as Clara or Marie, is gifted a nutcracker doll by her magical uncle. Clara falls asleep only to be awakened by a growing Christmas tree, evil mouse king, and her nutcracker doll coming to life. The Nutcracker defeats the Mouse King and takes Clara through a snowstorm to the Land of Sweets. The Land of Sweets is complete with dazzling candies and enchanting characters who are ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The story continues with "a suite of dances from other lands – or at least dances that a ballet choreographer imagines might happen in other lands" (Fisher, 2003). These dancers known as Chocolate, Tea, Coffee, and Trepak who identify as Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, and Russian, respectively, make up the national dances of *The Nutcracker*. "National dances combine music, physical appearance, and gestural characteristics into an image that the audience can easily relate to and identify with. These associations, while

consistent and easily recognized, they weren't always factually accurate" (Tendu TV, 2015).

Although the plot of the ballet is extremely imaginative it has received criticism for being more of a spectacle in comparison to Petipa and Tchaikovsky's other ballets. The ballet is performed regularly in Russia and did not reach its highest popularity or holiday connotation until it reached America in the 1950's. (Fleming-Markarian, 2014) *The Nutcracker* first appeared as part of San Francisco Ballet's season and a decade later it sparked huge interest at the New York City Ballet. George Balanchine took no reservation in choreographing his own version of the ballet. His incorporation of children not only spoke to aspiring young dancers but also established the ballet as family-friendly. What was once considered a downfall of the libretto was suddenly a strength – *The Nutcracker*'s weak storyline was one that anyone could enjoy, "the story is populated by visually stunning and balletically enticing characters and there's something in it for everyone" (Burton-Hill, 2015). The ballet was instantly a hit and is now considered a Christmas tradition to many. In America, *The Nutcracker* is an unspoken requirement for any major ballet company wishing to make a profit that will sustain them for the remainder of their season. In an art that is perceived as regal and exclusive, "The Nutcracker is like a great big Christmas present – pretty, delightful, carefree, without conflict, and above all, meant for pure enjoyment." (Reynolds, Reimer-Torn, 1991)

Once *The Nutcracker* established itself in American society, various versions of the ballet appeared across the country. Questions of representation arose when, "The Nutcracker now often switched ethnicities, locales, sexual preferences, and aesthetic sensibilities", adding and removing certain characteristics, but "even when small budgets or

plot alterations eliminate one of these must-see events, similar stories unfold…the ballet is still about having a dream, a journey, family ties" (Fisher, 2003). Regardless of the interpretation, the ballet repeatedly proves itself as an American holiday staple.

IX. National Dances in Ballets

The Nutcracker is not the only classical ballet that includes national dances that represent cultures and nations through choreography. "The idea of creating 'ethnic' dances from the imagination, based on outsider impressions of 'foreign' dancing, enjoyed great popularity in nineteenth-century European and American ballets" (Fisher, 2003). Many productions created in the eras of Romanticism and Classicism incorporate an aspect of international visitors. Some ballets incorporate national dances taking direct movement from folk dances. For example, *La Fille Mal Gardee* includes a scene of clog dancing that mirrors technically correct movement. However, for the majority of ballets, there is no evidence that cultures are being represented correctly and many would fail to stand against the aforementioned definitions of cultural appropriation and cultural misrepresentation.

Many ballets present characters who represent individual countries. Prior to *The Nutcracker*, Petipa and Ivanov collaborated to choreograph a revival of the ballet *Swan Lake* in 1890. The ballet has a much more tragic libretto than the holiday classic but, is similar in that it showcases a scene of national dances in the latter half of the production. Four princesses with their entourages dance in hopes of enticing the prince to marry them. The princesses are Hungarian, Russian, Spanish, and Italian and dance steps that Ivanov and Petipa fabricated to represent each country. (Reardon, 2016). Similarly, *Coppelia* highlights characters from individual countries. Choreographer, Arthur Saint-Leon, like in *The Nutcracker* took inspiration from one of E.T.A. Hoffman's short stories when he

choreographed the ballet *Coppelia* in 1870. The story includes life-size dolls that come to life – three of these dolls represent countries. Chinese, Spanish, and Scottish dolls perform national dances in a workshop scene. (Fleming-Markarian, 2012)

Petipa's *La Bayadere* is a ballet that could be accused of cultural misrepresentation as a whole. Set in India, characters throughout the ballet wear jeweled tutus and tops that expose their midriffs, carry parrots on their wrists, and partake in temple-dancing. There is even a scene that illustrates the dream of a character who is high from opioid use. In one review the ballet is claimed to, "feature one of the more preposterous plots" (Crompton 2017). *Le Corsaire* has also been accused of showcasing a frivolous libretto. Jules-Henry Vernoy de Saint-Georges wrote the libretto for the ballet intending to display characters from the Middle East. Although the performance requires incredibly strong technique it has been considered, "morally repugnant: Centered around the selling and stealing of sex slaves, it basically portrays women as weak, non-human objects, and Muslims as evil or buffoon-like" (Stahl, 2017).

The origins and inclusion of national dances can be credited to a culmination of balletic factors. The emergence of ballet in the court with heavy influence from folk dances along with choreographers' consistent fascination with cultural representation has resulted in a multitude of national dances in classical ballets. Many of the ballets are under the scrutiny of dance reviewers, however, it is imperative to take a deeper look at the choreography and use of music to determine whether these ballets can be accused of cultural misrepresentation. Analysis of the choreography, music, and costuming of the national dances in *The Nutcracker* will allow us to determine the accuracy of the depictions in America's most beloved ballet.

X. *The Nutcracker*'s National Dances: Choreography

The Nutcracker's "second-act dances have understandably taken a little heat in today's climate of increased cultural understanding and sensitivity to issues of appropriation and exoticization". Along with Petipa and Ivanov's choreography, the examination of the movement and style of the national dances by several choreographers can explain the credibility or lack of in each divertissement. Acknowledging that "it's hard to speak about *The Nutcracker*'s frothy international imaginings in general terms, because the adaptations vary so greatly, but there are similarities among many traditional versions" that allow for generalization.

Spanish (Chocolate)

The Spanish dancers who bring Clara the gift of chocolate are the first dancers to perform in the Land of Sweets. The original movement style that is displayed in Ivanov's version of the divertissement is comparable to Spanish style dancing, "with its arching backs, mobile shoulders, and head tossing, [it] takes its flair from flamenco and *escuela bolera*, a folk form merged with ballet" (Fisher, 2003). The dancers often embody characteristics that are consistent with Spanish dancing as well – exuding pride, flirtation, and ferocity. This style of movement is consistent across most Spanish dances in *The Nutcracker*. Whether it is performed on pointe as in Balanchine's version or in character shoes as in Mariinsky Theatre's version the flexibility of the torso and the grandeur of the leaps is present. In Mark Morris's interpretation of the ballet, the Spaniard personification is taken to an extreme as a woman is wearing bull horns and charges at her partner, a matador. Even in Matthew Bourne's satirical version in which the divertissements are

significantly altered, the Spanish characters do not diverge far from the original choreography style.

Arabian (Coffee)

Following the energetic and confident Spanish Dance is the Arabian Dance. Usually danced by a couple, the two bear the Land of Sweets with coffee. This divertissement provides a drastic change in pace, the original and most popular choreography is slow and extremely sultry. High extensions, backbends, and provocative poses are thrown in as the dancers weave across the stage – the man quite often treating the woman as his slave and manipulating her body into impressive stretches. Choreography requires dancers to "enact fantasies of 'the mysterious Middle East' that owe more to Hollywood than to Egypt or Iraq" and although "sensuality is found in dance of the Middle East, the exposed skin, male-female intimacy, and suggestive poses in many *Nutcracker* 'Arabians', are miles away from any dance sensibility found in that part of the world" (Fisher, 2003). Pacific Northwest Ballet produces a version of the Arabian Dance in which the character is a peacock. Although the choreography attempts to break free from the stereotypical characterization with uncommon jumps and a bird-like strut, the woman still returns to her cage at the end of the divertissement – a notion that the woman is not free. In Matthew Bourne's choreography, the Arabian dancer does not appear as a typical Arabian at all. However, he embodies the aura intended in the original choreography by constantly smoking and embracing Clara in a predatory manner. It is evident that even if choreographers can escape the visual characteristics of the stereotypical Middle East, the sultry atmosphere is an apparent requirement.

Chinese (Tea)

The Chinese Dance is the shortest of the divertissements and lasts no more than a minute in length. In this brief time, however, it is repeatedly considered the most offensive of the national dances. The dancers are bearers of tea and the upbeat music incorporates choreography that is sharp, yet small. Often requiring intricate footwork with hops on pointe and quick beats. "Many versions of Tea suggest the grace and smoothness of classical Chinese dance or the jaunty side-to-side movements of Chinese folk dance" however the choreography exaggerates these qualities with its use of gestures. It is often that the dancers will complete most of the dance with nodding heads and their index fingers raised as a representation of chopsticks. In many depictions, the Chinese dancers enter and exit by shuffling to and from Clara while bowing to signify their stereotypical subservience. Misrepresentation is present in various interpretations of the divertissement. The Australian Ballet provides a polar approach by presenting a display of tai chi in which the dancers move slowly without accent. Although this attempt is noble, "the Chinese characters are still conceived through the eyes of the West, looking a bit more mysterious than real tai chi" (Fisher, 2003). Maurice Bejart, in his circus-inspired rendition of *The Nutcracker*, choreographs a cheeky girl that is surrounded by several bicycling men. In Balanchine's rendition, two women open a small box to reveal the final member of their trio – a Chinese man.

Russian (Trepak)

The Russian dance is often a fan-favorite, resulting in boisterous cheers from all members of the audience. The dancers enter the stage with contagious energy and their sweet gift of trepak. This national dance is most regularly made up of an all-male cast that presents the audience with most impressive tricks. High jumps, fast turns, and acrobatics

with a Russian character flair are a staple of the national dance. Perhaps because of Ivanov's Russian descent, the divertissement "rarely draws accusations of negative stereotyping" (Fisher, 2003). Another version of the Russian Dance, that is equally popular, uses candy cane characters. George Balanchine began the choreographic trend of showcasing children dressed as candy canes jumping in and out of hula hoops. The Mark Morris version is the biggest outlier with various women hopping and shuffling across the stage. Regardless, Trepak is whimsical, rambunctious, and crowd-pleasing regardless of the interpretation.

XI. *The Nutcracker*'s National Dances: Music Composition

Pyotr Tchaikovsky composed *The Nutcracker* score with specific direction from Marius Petipa. Like the choreography, the music was originally criticized before it became a holiday classic. The composition, like the choreography, contributes to the question of authenticity of the national dances. Tchaikovsky is a Russian composer who aimed to mirror national qualities through music regardless of his identity and risk of cultural misrepresentation.

Spanish (Chocolate)

In creating the music for the Spanish Dance, it was easy to capture the right atmosphere by using castanets and specifically Spanish rhythms. Opening with a trumpeting bravura, the music is "a very lively piece, *allegro brilliante* in 3/4 time" (Fleming-Markarian, 2014). The music pairs well with the choreography and provides the audience with a dynamic experience.

Arabian (Coffee)

Composing the music for the Arabian Dance posed a different challenge. Tchaikovsky never studied Arabic music and was forced to fabricate his own inspiration. Tchaikovsky chose to build the dance from a Georgian lullaby, proving that he knew very little of that part of the world. “Since the music has nothing Arabic about it, aside from an imagined and possibly colonial sound, staging this dance (and the Chines one to follow) comes with certain risks of being either overtly or subtly offensive, as has often been true in the past” (Schroeder, 2015). Tchaikovsky’s choices resulted in a hypnotic piece in 3/8 rhythm that incorporates drums to enchant the audience like a snake charmer. (Fleming-Markarian, 2014)

Chinese (Tea)

Posing a similar challenge, Tchaikovsky generated a Westernized notion of Chinese music that can also be found in Hollywood representations of the nationality. He followed Petipa’s direction and composed an allegretto in 3/4 time using bells that highlights the intricate footwork that is often implemented in the variation. (Fleming-Markarian, 2014)

Russian (Trepak)

The Russian Dance was easiest for Tchaikovsky to produce because he was most familiar with his country’s style of music. Once again taking instruction from Petipa, Tchaikovsky created a rapid 2/4 in the Cossack style. This piece of music is rarely regarded as a misrepresentation, like the choreography, because of the maker’s descent. (Schroeder, 2015)

XII. *The Nutcracker*’s National Dances: Costuming and Props

As much as the choreography and music dictate the outcome of the dancers, the audience is more likely to remember how the characters appeared visually. Particularly in terms of cultural representation, there is a heightened risk of offense when the depiction of the character is tangible. In *The Nutcracker*, "there's a juxtaposition of many patterns and many colors beautifully orchestrated side by side so it is not garish or gaudy but full of vibrancy and life" (Cheney, 2011) which makes the characters particularly memorable and the national dances exaggerated.

Spanish (Chocolate)

The Spanish Dance is often made up of males and females with coordinating costumes. The red, yellow, black, and white colors reflect the choreography and lively music. The women often wear dresses that are corset-like on the top with sleeves that droop off the shoulder and multi-layered skirts that move with ease. The men wear waistcoats and downsized bicorn hats that would be common for a Spanish king to wear. In terms of props, castanets, hand-held fans, and the occasional bull – as in Mark Morris's and Maurice Béjart's vision – are used. The overall appearance is typical of Spanish folkloric dancers denoting most productions as historically and nationally accurate. (Fleming-Markarian, 2014)

Arabian (Coffee)

Unlike, the Spanish dancers, the Arabian characters' costumes lack all authenticity. "These days there are all kinds of 'Arabian' vamps slinking along in ballooning chiffon pants with jeweled belly buttons" that are inaccurate and suggestive. Men are often shirtless and occasionally wear a turban. The use of veils, finger cymbals, and hookah pipes

further the exaggerated image. The style is consistent across the various versions of the Arabian Dance, even the peacock rendition. (Fisher, 2003)

Chinese (Tea)

Chinese dancers are heavily accessorized with costumes, props, makeups, and for the men: wigs. The women usually wear a kimono-style top, traditionally a Japanese garment, with silk pants. If they are not using their index fingers to gesture, fans, parasols, or a paper dragon are common props. Men wear tunics, coolie hats, and ballet shoes designed to imitate sandals. Original renditions involve a faux ponytail or braid for the men with a drawn-on mustache. In bolder choices, eyeliner is used to create an almond eye appearance.

Russian (Trepak)

If the Russian dancers are representing candy canes, they wear simple unitards that are striped head to toe and carry identically striped hula hoops as props. For the more traditional folk-dancing Russians, the costume for men includes fur hats and tall boots. Red, orange, cream, and brown are used to mimic Slovak character dancers.

By analyzing the choreography, music, and costuming of the national dances, acknowledging the ethnicity of the creators, and recalling the definition of stereotyping as "any simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or development is kept to a minimum" (Hall, 1997) it is clear that cultural misrepresentation is apparent in *The Nutcracker*. In her book, *Nutcracker Nation,* Jennifer Fisher claims that not many choreographers and contributors are "recognizing the fact that world views shift, and cultural exchange is an

exciting frontier" towards which companies should "swerve in the direction of a more authentic ethnic hybridity" (Fisher, 2003).

XIII. Cultural Misrepresentation in Pop Culture and the Arts

Ballet is not the only art form that includes cultural misrepresentation. What differentiates ballet, (Consider adding a comma before the interrupter ***however***.) however, is that it does not receive the same backlash that other pop culture products do. Other art forms, "assert the authority to alter or even obliterate collective memories of non-Western cultures and to re-define them in its own terms" but, have recently been under scrutiny for this tendency. To analyze the misrepresentation and response in other art forms, a deeper look into a film, a musical, a play, and a music video will be taken. (Yin, 2010)

Mulan

Disney has been criticized several times for cultural misrepresentation and racism. One Disney film, *Song of the South*, has been removed from the media and banned from schools for its portrayal of life on the plantation. Another film that has received backlash is the 1998 production of *Mulan*. Although Disney producers claimed that they studied Chinese culture extensively and cast Chinese actors to voice the characters, the film was not well received by Chinese people. Chinese scholars have identified several fallacies in the film in terms of culture, tradition, and morals. "By ignoring the internal diversity of Chinese culture and inaccurately representing Chinese and other Asian cultures (e.g., Huns for Mongols), Disney essentially portrays non-Western cultures as monolithic Others and perpetuates the racial hierarchy." This perpetuation, however, has received much pushback from audiences. And in Disney's upcoming live-action version of *Mulan*, expected to be

released in 2020, many plot points have been changed to provide a more accurate depiction. (Yin, 2010)

The King and I

The musical, *The King and I*, debuted in 1951 on Broadway and has since been adapted to film and revived. Often marketed and remembered as a romantic musical, the plot includes several instances of sexism and racism. Throughout the story "slavery, murder, flagellation, prostitution, polygamy, and human trafficking — not to mention the consistent degradation of women and racialized "other"-ing of the Siamese people" is present. However, audiences have looked beyond the romantic forefront of the musical enough to motivate a change in the latest version. Rodger and Hammerstein's revival in 2016, makes a bold statement by prioritizing cultural accuracy rather than decadent staging. The new version received raving views and left the audience with a fresh and empowering feeling. (Lewis, 2016)

Merchant of Venice

There have even been attempts to correct classic librettos, such as Shakespeare plays. The original *The Merchant of Venice* portrays a Jewish man as a bloodthirsty menace to society. Because of this, there have been many instances in which the play has been offensive enough to spark requests for removal from media and theatre company repertoire. The Bell Shakespeare company took these requests to heart and aimed to change the play enough to leave a thought-provoking alternate ending. The company went as far as to add additional lines to the play that acknowledge the original antisemitism approach. (Montefiore, 2017)

Freaky Friday

One of the most recent productions of cultural misrepresentation in pop culture is rapper, Lil Dicky's music video for his single, *Freaky Friday*. The music video and rap lyrics highlight prejudices between white culture and black culture but blatantly misrepresent Chinese culture – it is abundant in racial stereotyping. Since the music videos release in March 2018, it has received over 100 million views as well as countless accusations of stereotyping and racism. Although the music video remains playable on several sites, it received immediate backlash. (Robinson, 2018)

These accounts of misrepresentation in both classics and pop culture premieres have received substantial criticism. The audience response across all discussed art forms has motivated a change for future interpretations. This attempt to be culturally and racially correct, however, is not present in classical ballet productions. Although balletomanes consider the inaccuracies of representation, there has not been any public criticism of cultural appropriation. (Au, 2002)

XIV. National Dances in the Contemporary World

A decade ago, the Royal Opera House received backlash for its production of *Madame Butterfly*. The opera was called racist and is accustomed to political criticism. The Royal Opera House defended the opera by explaining that it is a product of the time in which it was written. An opera scholar claims, "people are too frightened of intervening in opera to make a modern production, by cutting out or changing some parts." This can be said of the national dances in classical ballets as well. In the contemporary world, dance scholars are

just beginning to consider the effects of cultural misrepresentation and how to address them. (Iggulden, 2007)

In some opinions, cultural misrepresentation is accepted in classical ballets. Some argue that cultural appropriation is a part of the artistic process, "Artists from many cultures are constantly engaging in cultural appropriation. Picasso famously appropriated motifs which originated in the work of African carvers" (Young, 2008). Others rely on the sacredness of ballet and claim that it is precisely a product of the time. Specific to *The Nutcracker* choreographers explain that since the ballet was created in 19th century by Europeans that it is exclusive rather than racist, "It excludes the Other and reserves its experiences for a particular group: Anglo-Europeans. This group is mirrored back to itself onstage in *The Nutcracker*" (Byrd, 2013).

A large portion of the ballet world, however, is more critical of how *The Nutcracker* is perceived. One choreographer discusses, "In many versions of *Nutcracker*, one sees overt racial stereotypes. In the second-act divertissements, many of the dances or variations are borderline caricatures, if not downright demeaning." (Alexander, 2013). There is a new demand for cultural acceptance in ballet, "We have a long way to go to racially diversify the ballet companies, but they're making progress. Something has changed. Maybe it's the reality that the demographics have changed in this country. The conversation is just getting real" (USA Today 2017), but there is room for progress in terms of the content that classical ballets produce.

XV. Conclusion

By defining culture, investigating cultural misrepresentation, and analyzing the national dances of *The Nutcracker*, it is clear that cultural misrepresentation is present in classical ballet. Although the national dances differ from one version of *The Nutcracker* to the next, there is an undeniable presence of stereotyping. In other art forms, signs of cultural misrepresentation are addressed, but in ballet, there is a divide between acceptance and the beginnings of a discussion of cultural accuracy. It will be difficult to find a balance of preserving the masterworks and correcting misrepresentations, but it is a challenge worth taking for ballet companies across the world.

References

Au, S. (2002). *Ballet and modern dance* (2nd ed. ed., World of art). New York: Thames & Hudson.

Burning Question: Is Nutcracker Racist? Dance Magazine (2017, March 09). Retrieved September 15, 2017

Burton-Hill, C. (2015, December 22). Culture - How Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker became Christmas classic. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20151218-how-tchaikovskys-nutcracker-became-a-christmas-classic

Cass, J. (1993). *Dancing through history*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Cheney, Alexandra. Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]15 Nov 2011: A.27.

Crompton, S. (2017, August 13). Mariinsky Ballet: La Bayadère; Contrasts review – truly elevated company. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/aug/13/la-bayadere-contrasts-mariinsky-ballet-review-royal-opera-house

Eagleton, T. (2016). *Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Films Media Group, & Tendu TV, Inc (Directors). (2015). Sensuality & nationalism in romantic ballet [Motion picture on Online video]. Tendu TV.

Fisher, J. (2003). *"Nutcracker" nation : How an old world ballet became a christmas tradition in the new world*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hall, S., & Open University. (1997). *Representation : Cultural representations and signifying practices*(Culture, media, and identities). London: Sage in association with the Open University.

Hoerburger, F. (1968). Once Again: On the Concept of "Folk Dance". *Journal of the International Folk Music Council, 20*, 30-32. doi:10.2307/836068

Homans, J. (2011). Apollos angels: a history of ballet. New York: Random House.

Iggulden, A. (2007, February 14). Opera expert says Puccini's Butterfly is 'racist'. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1542633/Opera-expert-says-Puccinis-Butterfly-is-racist.html

J. (2011). Popular culture and public imaginary: Disney vs. chinese stories of mulan. *Javnost - the Public, 18*(1), 53-74. doi:10.1080/13183222.2011.11009051

J. (2017, October 03). Why Le Corsaire is My Favorite "Terrible" Ballet. Retrieved from http://www.dancemagazine.com/le-corsaire-favorite-terrible-ballet-2434665976.html

Jenks, C. (2004). *Culture*. Taylor & Francis.

Lewis, C. (2017, December 07). 'The King and I' Revival's Important Message. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-lewis/the-king-and-i-message_b_8940460.html

Macaulay, A. (2012, July 03). 'Le Corsaire' From American Ballet Theater. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/04/arts/dance/le-corsaire-from-american-ballet-theater.html

Macauley, A. (2012, September 05). Ballet Clings to Racial, Ethnic and National Stereotypes. New York Times.

Manguel, A. (2015). *Curiosity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Nadel, M., & Strauss, M. (2003). *The dance experience : Insights into history, culture, and creativity*(The all new 2nd ed. ed.). Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book.

Reeves-Ellington, R., & Yammarino, F. (2010). *What is culture? : Generating and applying cultural knowledge*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Reynolds, N., & McCormick, M. (2003). No fixed points: dance in the twentieth century. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Reynolds, N., Reimer-Torn, S., & Reynolds, N. (1991). Dance classics: a viewers guide to the best-loved ballets and modern dances. Chicago, IL: A Cappella Books.

Schroeder, D. (2015). *Experiencing tchaikovsky : A listener's companion* (Listener's companion). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sebag-Montefiore, C. (2017, November 03). If a Shakespeare play is racist or antisemitic, is it OK to change the ending? Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/nov/03/if-a-shakespeare-play-is-racist-or-antisemitic-is-it-ok-to-change-the-ending

Shay, A. (2002). *Choreographic politics : State folk dance companies, representation, and power*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Siegel, M. (1972). At the vanishing point: A critic looks at dance. New York: Saturday Review Press.

Stokes, A. (1935). Russian ballets. London: Faber & Faber, Limited.

The National Ballet of Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://national.ballet.ca/Productions/2016-17-Season/Swan-Lake/Further-Reading/Swan-Lake-Synopsis

Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Young, J. (2008). *Cultural appropriation and the arts* (New directions in aesthetics, 6). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. doi:10.1002/9780470694190

Ziff, B., & Rao, P. (1997). *Borrowed power : Essays on cultural appropriation*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.